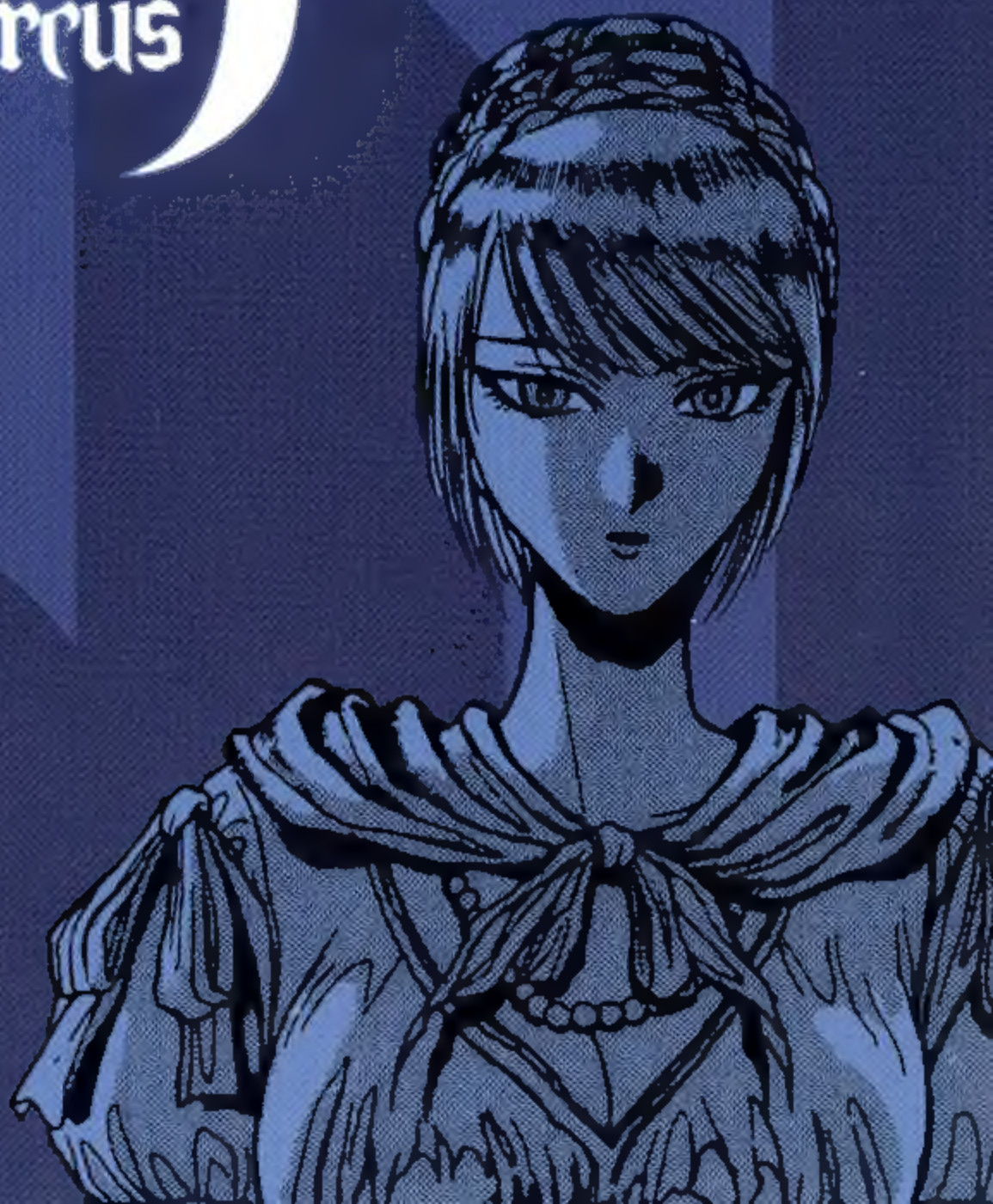
BLACKOUT

KAZUHIRO FUJITA

Karakuri K9 circus



karakuri circus

9

KAZUHIRO FUJITA

★ SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS VOLUMES ★

NARUMI KATO, A JAPANESE MARTIAL ARTIST TRAINED IN CHINA, WAS INVOLVED IN A SERIOUS ACCIDENT, DURING WHICH HE LOST AN ARM. BECAUSE OF THE ENSUING SHOCK, HE HAS PARTIALLY LOST HIS MEMORY AND NOW LIVES QUASI-INCOGNITO IN FRANCE.
A MAN NAMED GUY, WHO CONSIDERS HIMSELF A DOCTOR AND WHO IS ALSO CALLED "SHIROGANE", TELLS NARUMI OF THE LINKS BETWEEN THE AQUA VITAE, THE FAMOUS AND MIRACULOUS WATER OF THE ALCHEMISTS; ALL THE SHIROGANES; THE AUTOMATONS; AND THE TERRIBLE DISEASE, ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME. GUY'S HIDDEN AGENDA IS IN FACT TO FORCE NARUMI TO ALSO BECOME A SHIROGANE, A DESTRUCTOR OF AUTOMATONS.
AT FIRST, NARUMI OPPOSES GUY'S MACHINATIONS. BUT IN CARNAC, HE WITNESSES A GROUP OF EXTREMELY VIOLENT AUTOMATONS, WHO ABDUCT CHILDREN AND ENDANGER THEIR LIVES IN THE WORST WAY. HE THEN ENGAGES THE AUTOMATONS BARE-HANDED.
AFTER HIS VICTORY, HE DECIDES TO KEEP UP THE FIGHT IN ORDER TO ANNIHILATE THESE EVIL BEINGS WHO SPREAD ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME EVERYWHERE AND FEED ON THE BLOOD OF HUMANS TO ENSURE THEIR OWN SURVIVAL.
NARUMI IS THUS GOING TO OFFICIALLY BECOME A SHIROGANE, AND LUCILLE (THE OLDEST LIVING SHIROGANE) WILL FINALLY BE ABLE TO REVEAL TO HIM A TERRIBLE SECRET...

ACT VIII

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VVHHHHH

A LONG TIME AGO...

...THERE STOOD MY VILLAGE.

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"ONCE UPON A TIME / I"

THE NAME OF THE VILLAGE WAS KER'LOIC.

IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN 200 YEARS NOW...

TANIA AND MARY LIVED THERE TOO.

AND OUR VILLAGE WAS NOT RICH!

THE WIND FROM THE SEA TO THE NORTHWEST WAS ALWAYS COLD

BUT... I LIKED IT JUST THE WAY IT WAS.

I was a simple village woman, with a husband and two children, just like everyone else.

I'LL BRING YOU YOUR LUNCH IN A BIT.

ALRIGHT ...

BE CAREFUL, OKAY?

That is where I was born and raised.

BYE, MOMMY!

... LUCILLE!

LET'S GO...

These two women were my childhood friends. Since men were lacking around the village, Tania had become the teacher of our village. Mary was a villager's wife, like me.

HEY! MARY, TANIA!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

SO?

WHAT DID HE DO?

UNCLE JOHN JUST RAN ACROSS HIM...

LUCILLE, DID YOU HEAR THE LATEST ABOUT THE "MAN IN BLACK"?

He was a strange man who lived in a big castle away from the village...

The "man in black"! Everyone in the village knew about him, but nobody wanted to talk about it.

GOOH

In fact, I believe he was already there when I was a child.

I clearly remember the adults telling the children never to approach his castle.

I did not know how long he had been living there.

SOME SAID HE DUG PITS IN THE CEMETARY.

SUCH AS?

STRANGE RUMORS ABOUT HIM WERE NUMEROUS!

BUT THE ADULTS DID NOT SEEM TO KNOW WHO THAT MAN REALLY WAS, EITHER.

I WONDER WHY THAT MAN WAS NEVER WORRIED, OR ACCUSED OF HERESY AND WITCHCRAFT...

DURING THOSE TIMES, SOME PROFESSIONS WERE STARTING TO MODERNIZE, BUT IN YOUR RURAL VILLAGE, MANY SUPERSTITIONS MUST HAVE STILL EXISTED...

OTHERS SAID THEY HAD HEARD HIM SCREAM MYSTERIOUS WORDS TOWARDS THE SKY.

I remember perfectly what Tania and Mary told me on that day.

INDEED...

When Uncle John, who was a miller, went home with a bag of flour on his shoulder, it was already night...

I told Mary that there was nothing strange about that. But she insisted, saying that the lady was extremely beautiful...

He saw the man in black taking a walk, accompanied by a beautiful young lady. We all knew, however, that this man lived alone.

...she never blinked, not even once!

... and also that...

SORRY, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE TIME TO THINK ABOUT THAT!

USUALLY, HE SEEMS PRETTY MUCH MUTE. ISN'T THAT STRANGE?!

REMEMBER THAT THE MAY FESTIVAL IS APPROACHING.

I HEARD THAT THE MAN TALKED TO THE LADY SEVERAL TIMES!

NOBODY CAN KEEP THEIR EYES OPEN INDEFINITELY!

HA HA HA! THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! UNCLE JOHN MUST HAVE BEEN WRONG!

IN THE OLD DAYS, IN SOME FRENCH VILLAGES, PEOPLE ORGANIZED A FESTIVAL IN MAY TO BRING A GOOD HARVEST IN THE FALL...

THE MAY FESTIVAL?

BUT...
IT WAS SO
BUT IN THE
DAY THE
ON THE
ENTIRE
MEN

AT THOSE TIMES
THE CIRCUS
TO US
WATCHING
NUMBERS
FROM STREET
ACROBATS
WAS A
UNIQUE MOMENT
EVERY TIME HER
ARMS TO ANGEL
FALLEN
ANGEL

AT THOSE TIMES I DID NOT PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT PEOPLE SAID ABOUT THE CIRCUS
AND HOW WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO WORK
I THINK I'LL GO TO WORK IN THE CIRCUS
AND HOW WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO WORK

At any rate... not until that night.

WWWH

EXACTLY WHERE THE CASTLE OF THE MAN IN BLACK IS.

SAH

HUH? THAT'S WEIRD... THERE'S A RED LIGHT BEHIND THE HILL...

ZOH!

...I would never have seen... all those things...

If I had not gone...

I don't know what took me... I suddenly decided to go see where that red light was coming from by myself.

Near a little well, an unusual scene was taking place...

...as well as four strange figures which leapt about.

A strange red light was coming out of that well.

It shone on the man in black...

The others took a great number of poses.

One of them played a musical instrument.

All the movements of these four characters...

In fact...

...seemed to have only one goal: to make the lady standing before them laugh...

A woman... of incredible beauty! So beautiful that she could not be human!

BUT IT WAS TO NO AVAIL

BECAUSE THE D CAN'T ES THE D EXPRES- SIONS THE MUSIC ITSELF WERE ALL QUITE RIDICU- LOUS

HOW COULD YOU TELL THAT THEY WANTED TO MAKE HER LAUGH?

Not only did the woman not laugh... she did not move a single inch!

Their comical antics bored and irked her to pure

GROAN!

FRANCINE

WHY AREN'T YOU LAUGHING?

YOU DON'T FIND THEM AMUSING?

I WILL SHOW YOU FARCICAL AND RIDICULOUS NUMBERS...

...WITH SOME HELP FROM THE VILLAGERS NEXT DOOR!

SO THAT YOU CAN FINALLY LAUGH!

IN THAT CASE... I WILL HAVE TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING EVEN FUNNIER...

HE HE HE HE...

AAAAAHHH!

...that none of the beings around that well were really alive!

I ran away, despite the fear that paralyzed me!

I do not really know how I did, but... I understood...

I TRIED TO FORGET WHAT I HAD JUST SEEN.

I TRIED TO CONVINCE MYSELF THAT I HAD JUST HAD A NIGHTMARE.

And... even that man...

That woman...

Those performers...

SO? WHAT HAPPENED AFTER-WARDS?

UHM ...

I COULD NOT FORGET WHAT THAT MAN HAD SAID.

UNFORTU-NATELY, I WAS NEVER ABLE TO FORGET THAT TERRIBLE NIGHT...

ON THAT DAY, OUR VILLAGE DISAP-PEARED.

Uhm!

... AND?

SHORTLY AFTER...

THE FESTIVAL TOOK PLACE IN THE VILLAGE.

GUY! WE'RE AT THE CLIMAX OF THE STORY!

IT'S RATHER COLD OUT HERE... WOULD YOU RATHER NOT GO TO A WARMER PLACE AND HAVE A LITTLE GLASS OF WINE?

WHAT IS IT, GUY?

Fhh

It's not cold at all!

UHM! LISTEN TO ME FOR A MINUTE!

WHAT ?!

VERY WELL...

YOU CAN FREEZE TO DEATH, I DON'T CARE!

VOLOM VOLOM

MOMMYYY!

SHUT UP! DIDN'T YOU WANNA KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS WHOLE AFFAIR TOO?!

I'M VERY SICK...

HEUH HEUH

LET US GO TO THE BASEMENT ...

... OF THE CASTLE

YOU'LL BE EVEN MORE SURPRISED WHEN YOU GET TO THE BASEMENT!

THAT'S PRETTY SURPRISING! THERE'S AN ELEVATOR IN THIS CASTLE?!

...WHY?

SHUNG

WOW!

ZZN

WHERE ARE WE?

WHOA ...

IS IT...

UH...

...

NARUMI, CAN YOU HELP ME OPEN THIS BOTTLE? LET YOUR BRUTISH FORCE BE USEFUL FOR SOMETHING, AT LEAST ...

NARU-MI!

IT IS NO LONGER IN USE...

WE ARE IN THE FORMER HEADQUARTERS OF THE SHIRO-GANES.

HM...

SHE IS THE "WITCH" WHO CAME TO OUR VILLAGE DURING THE MAY FESTIVAL.

SO... THAT MEANS...

THAT WOMAN ...

SO THAT NO SHIROGANE WOULD EVER FORGET THAT DAY, SHE PAINTED THIS PORTRAIT AND HUNG IT HERE.

TANIA WAS A GIFTED PAINTER.

SHE IS ALSO THE HEAD OF THE "MIDNIGHT CIRCUS" WHICH IS STILL ACTIVE SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD...

SHE IS THE HEAD OF THE AUTOMATONS THAT WE SHIROGANES TRY TO DESTROY BY ANY AND ALL MEANS.

THIS IS THE ONE THAT THE AUTOMATONS CALL "MISTRESS FRANCINE".

BLACKOUT

ACT VIII :- KARAKURI * MACHINERY

"ONCE UPON A TIME II"

THE WOMAN IN THAT PAINTING IS FRANCINE...

...THE HEAD OF THE AUTO-MATONS?!

GUY... WHERE'S THAT WOMAN RIGHT NOW?

WHAT'S WRONG, NARUMI? YOU KEEP STARING AT THAT PAINTING WITHOUT SAYING A SINGLE WORD...

I'VE SEEN HER...AND I'VE EVEN TALKED TO HER...

SHE LOOKS LIKE THAT GIRL... I BARELY REMEMBER... WHO WAS SHE?

NARUMI, DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT FRANCINE?

...I ALMOST CAUGHT HER, BUT SHE WAS ABLE TO ESCAPE...

A LONG TIME AGO ...

...

DO YOU KNOW SOMETHING THAT WE DON'T? SHE, WHOSE NAME IS SYNONYMOUS WITH EVIL FOR ALL THE SHIROGANES.

THE FIRST OF ALL THOSE AUTOMATONS WE HATE SO MUCH.

SHE'S THE CAUSE OF EVERY-THING.

I GUESS... I'VE MISTAKEN HER WITH SOMEBODY ELSE.

NO...

SHE EVEN...

...LOOKED REALLY SAD.

...DIDN'T LOOK LIKE A TERRIFYING DEVIL...

IN MY MEMORIES... THAT GIRL...

WELL I...

THAT INFAMOUS DAY, WHEN SHE CAME INTO OUR VILLAGE OF KER'LOIC...

IT'S NORMAL. SHE'S SO BEAUTIFUL.

HNN ...

ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME ...

AND ALSO WITH HER ...

WITH FOUR CLOWNS AND A MAN IN BLACK...

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF MAY.

IT WAS A BEAU-TIFUL DAY...

MORE THAN 200 YEARS AGO...

WE WERE ALL GATHERED IN THE SMALL PLACE AT THE ENTRANCE TO OUR VILLAGE.

SOMEONE TOLD ME THE ACROBATS SHOULD BE COMING ANY MINUTE NOW!

MOMMY, MOMMY, EVERYONE'S ALREADY WAITING!

The inhabitants of Kor'lok had became accustomed to welcoming...

...the artists who were coming to entertain them.

I believe that at that very moment...

...I had almost forgotten about what I had seen the previous night.

"I WILL HAVE TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING..."

"...EVEN FUNNIER!"

I must have convinced myself that what I had seen near the castle...

...was just a bad dream.

HA HA HA

YES, BUT DON'T SPEND TOO MUCH MONEY!

MADAM, MAY WE BUY CANDIES?

GOOD MORNING, LUCILLE! I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHO'S COMING THIS YEAR... WILL THERE BE A TRAPEZE ARTIST?

MARY, TANIA!

DONG DING

LISTEN, MOMMY! THE BELL IS RINGING!

DING DONG

SINCE TANIA IS OUR TEACHER, ALL THE CHILDREN COME TO SEE HER.

THEY'RE COMING!

DONG DING

DING DONG

YES. THERE'S ONLY ONE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE NEIGHBOR-ING VILLAGE.

THIS IS STRANGE ...

GLING TAN DADAN

HM?

IT'S THE PATH THAT LEADS TO...

THAT'S IMPOS-SIBLE...

THEY'RE COMING BY THE OTHER WAY!

WAAAHH

Before we even had time to react...

The children, impatient as always, were already gone!

VA VA VA VA LANG TAN DADAN

My son...

...two.

"FROM THE VILLAGERS NEXT DOOR"

"WITH SOME HELP..."

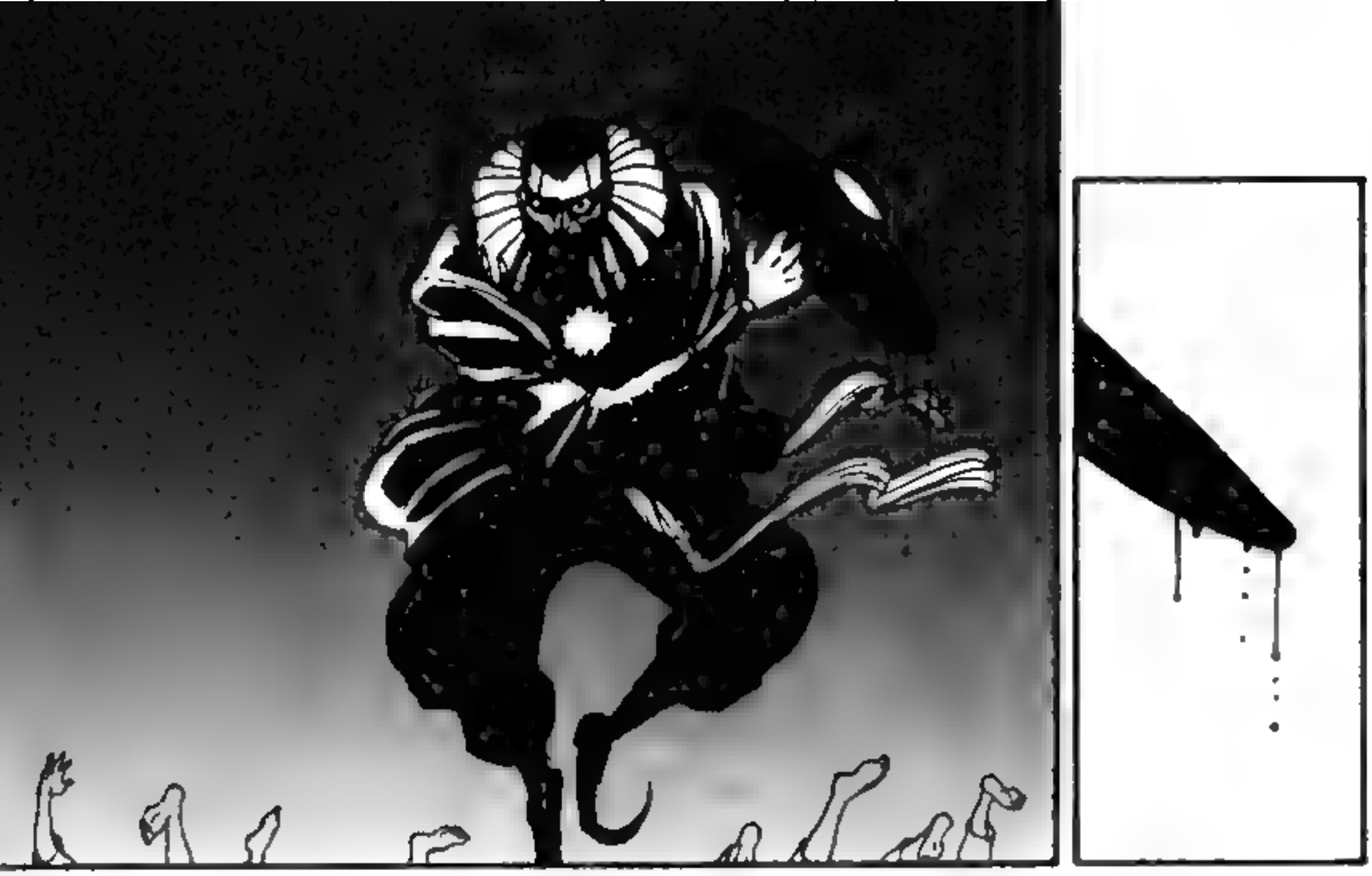
"SO THAT YOU CAN FINALLY LAUGH!"

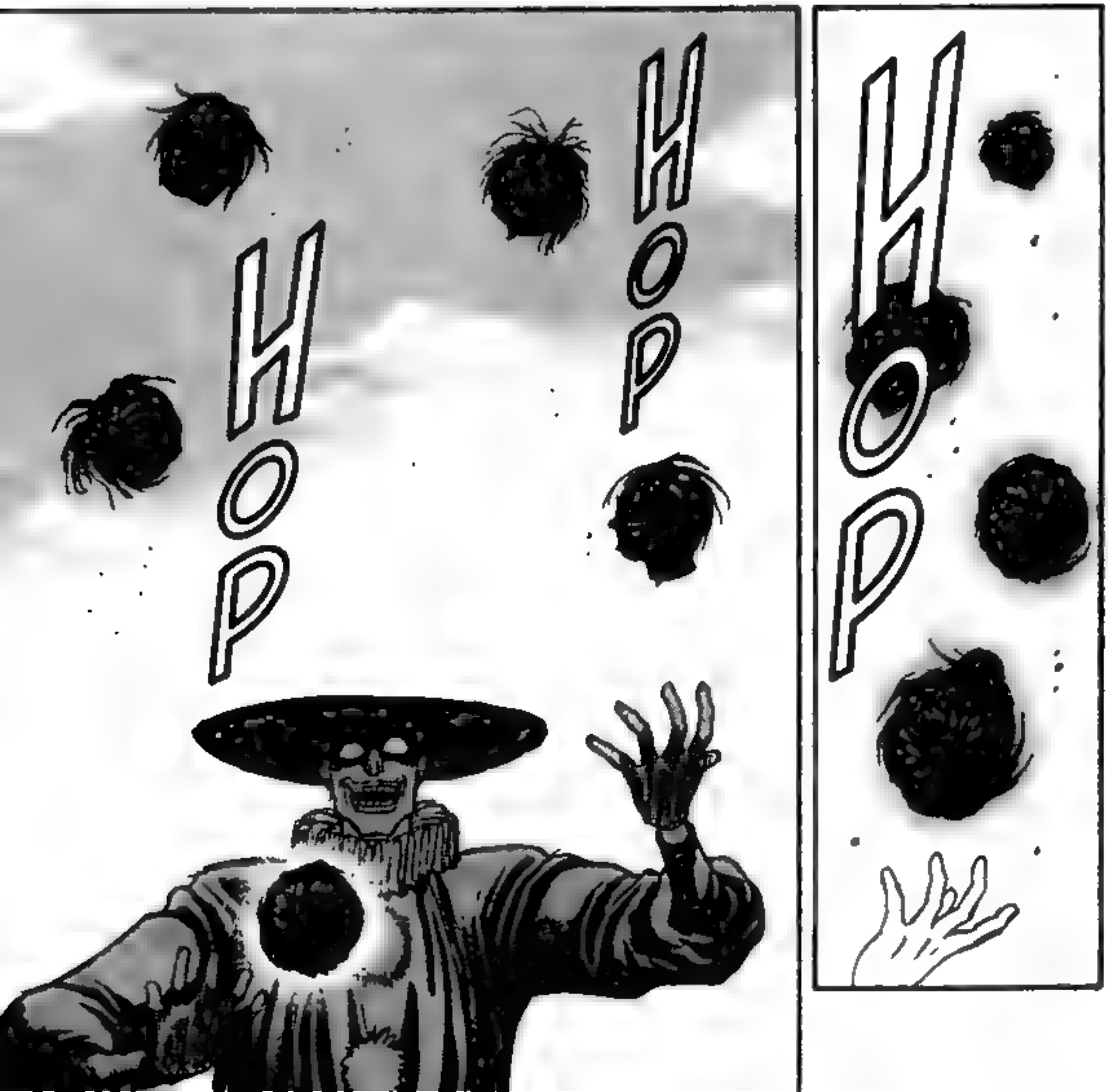
"I WILL HAVE TO SHOW YOU FARCICAL AND RIDICULOUS NUMBERS..."

COME BACK AAAA

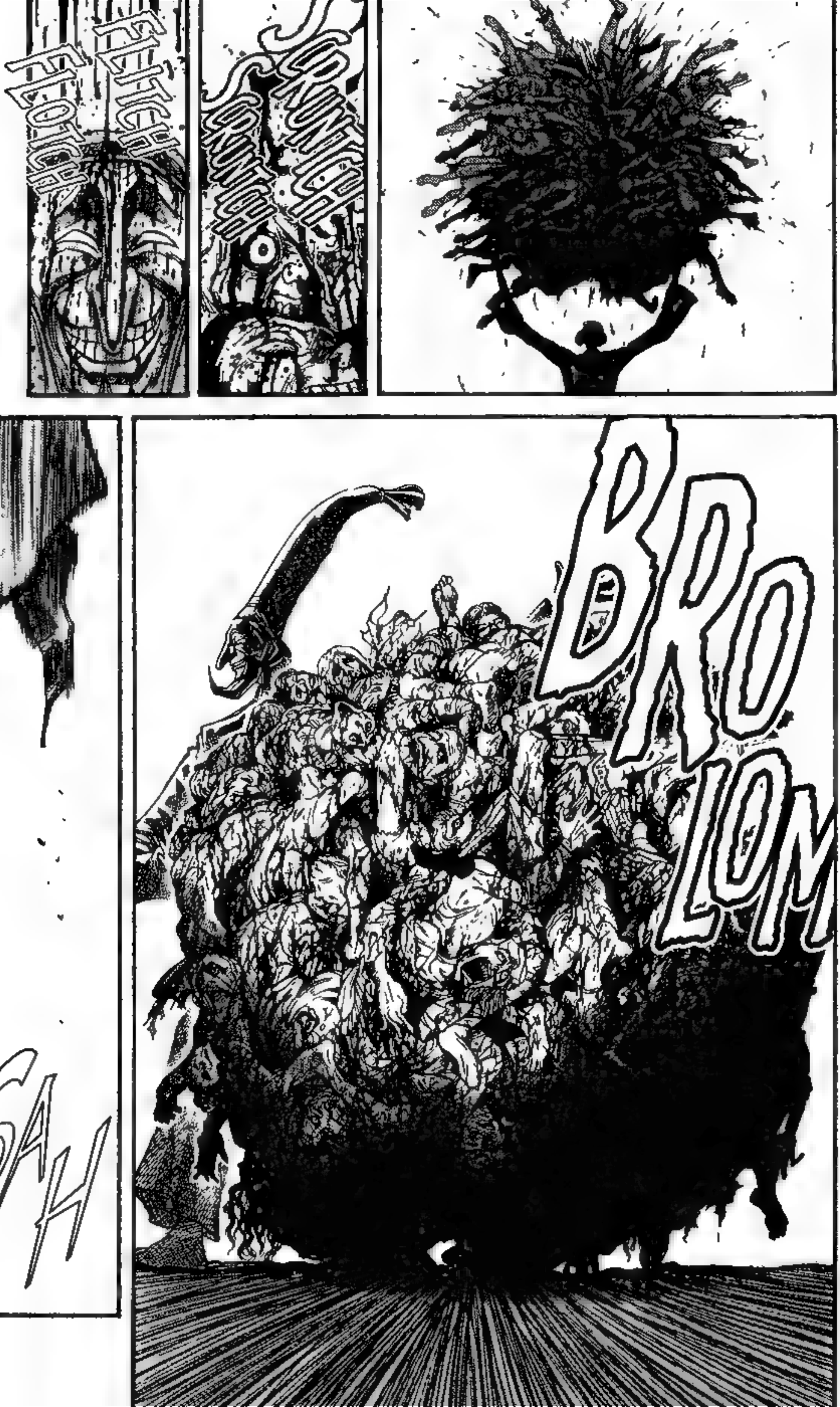
They made a strange noise when hitting the floor...

The little coins the children had been given by their parents, at the price of painful chores, were suddenly spread on the floor...falling from their hands...




HOPO

AHHH !!
OHH!
SHOCKWAVE


FIGHT FOR
SURVIVAL
BRO
LOM
SMASH

HOP

HOP

VLEU TCH

TCH

AAAAHHH!!

The music which was still playing mixed with the screams of the villagers...

...Those awful screams... were coming out of my own mouth!

I didn't understand that the screams I was hearing...

I told myself: "I'm going mad"

"raving mad"

AAAH!!

AAAH!!

AAAH!!

AAHH...

OUAH!

HA HA HA HA

HA HA HA HA

LOOK AT HOW SKILLFUL PANTALON IS! HE'S ROLLING ON A BALL MADE OF HUMAN BODIES!

LOOK AT OUR DEAR DOTTORE! ALL THOSE HANDS AND LEGS THAT ARE JUMPING EVERYWHERE!

HAHAHA!! SO, FRANCINE, WHAT DO YOU THINK? IT'S RATHER FUNNY, ISN'T IT?

FLAP

FLAP

FLAP

In the middle of those four "monsters" who displayed themselves as farcical figures was the man in black.

COLOMBINE! ARLEQUINO!

COME ON, MY FRIENDS! PRESENT TO ALL THOSE VILLAGERS A BEAUTIFUL PERFORMANCE!

And to his side was standing the famous Francine, with a pale and unexpressive face...

All of a sudden, a silver smoke came out of their musical instruments.

...and entered their bodies!

And that smoke was heading to the villagers, as if it was alive...

YOU'RE GONNA DIE IF YOU CAN'T MAKE OTHERS LAUGH!

HII!

HII!

NOW, YOU'RE ALL CONTAMINATED BY ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

HII!

LISTEN TO ME!

It was the first Sunday of May, a sunny Sunday...

YOU'RE ALL GONNA BECOME ETERNAL CLOWNS AND YOU'LL BE FORCED TO DEDICATE YOUR LIVES TO MAKE OTHERS LAUGH!

YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE MY FRANCINE LAUGH!

IF YOU WANNA SURVIVE...

...ALL OF A SUDDEN!

...HELL APPEARED...

IN THE VILLAGE OF KER'LOIC...

BLACKOUT

IT WAS 200 YEARS AGO...

...ON A BEAUTIFUL DAY...

THEY APPEARED ...

...AND OUR VILLAGE SUDDENLY BECAME A NAMELESS HELL!

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"ONCE UPON A TIME / III"

THEY KILLED KIDS...

...TO MAKE TOYS OUT OF THEM?!

PFT ...

WHAT-EVER!

DOH

SHIT!!! WHO DO THEY THINK THEY ARE?!

...THAT COVERED THE WHOLE VILLAGE

...A STRANGE SILVERY SMOKE.

FROM THEIR MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS CAME.

This smoke homed in on the villagers, as if it had a life of its own.

The smoke entered my throat.

It was thick... practically solid. I felt feverish almost immediately...

I, too, fell victim to it...

...as well as unimaginable pain! I could barely breathe!

YOU WILL NOT ESCAPE THIS SUFFERING UNTIL YOU MAKE OTHERS LAUGH!

YOU ARE NOW INFECTED WITH ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

The man in black was shouting...

It was the same for Mary and Tania.

...YOU'LL HAVE TO BECOME PLAYFUL CLOWNS FOR HER!

IF YOU WANT TO BE SAVED ...

COME, NOW! MAKE MY BEAUTIFUL FRANCINE LAUGH!

GUH ...

AH ...

To us... what did "make others laugh" mean?

But we were just simple peasants who worked the soil every day and lived modestly.

WHAT?! THERE'S NO ONE...

...TO MAKE MY FRANCINE LAUGH?!

TAN TAN

HAH ...

TAN TAN

GUH ...

IIIK CLAC

LOOK, FRANCINE! OUR LITTLE CLOWNS WOULD RATHER HIDE BACKSTAGE THAN BE IN OUR LITTLE PLAY!

THEY WENT TO HIDE IN THE CHURCH ...

AAAH!

ARLEQUINO! SHOW THEM THE EXTENT OF YOUR ART!

ZAH

VOF VOF VOF VOF

SCHAA

SCHAA

VOF

VOF

VOF

RAHRAHRAH

RAH

AHAHAHA

THAT'S FUNNY, ISN'T IT?

CAN YOU HEAR IT, FRANCINE?! IT'S THE CHOIR OF THE DOOMED LITTLE CLOWNS!

HA HA HA!!!

COLOMBINE IS DOING HER BALANCING ACT!

LOOK, FRANCINE!

OH!

CRAC CROC

GOOH

HA HA HA !!!

HA HA HA!!!

H

THERE IS STILL A LITTLE CLOWN LEFT!

WELL, WELL!

It was...

...my oldest daughter!

GOOH...

...I'LL BE THE ONE TO MAKE YOU LAUGH!

FRANCINE, THIS TIME...

AN... GELICA...

ZAN!

LOOK!

but I...

I felt I'd lost all reason...

ANGELICAA!

...would never have let him touch my daughter!

JAN JAN JAN

F... FRÄN-
CINE!

KLANK

The girl had used her own body to protect the man in black!

And then...

HOW?

BAAF

...with expressionless eyes.

She looked at me...

I saw it all...

Then ...

SHRIK

ARE YOU ALRIGHT?!

FRANCINE!

This girl was just a machine.

Gears, pieces of metal, tubes, iron wires... that was all there was inside her body!

YES, ALL IS FINE...

HHH

HHH

AH ...

AAAH!

WHF

AND THEM, TOO!

I CREATED HER!

FRANCINE IS NOT A HUMAN BEING!

VLAF VLOF

BUT...

A LITTLE CLOWN DOESN'T NEED TO UNDER-STAND!

YOU'LL NEVER UNDER-STAND!

DON'T KILL MY DAUGH-TER!

I BEG YOU...

LET'S DANCE!

AND NOW, THE GRAND FINALE!

YOU'RE ALL DOOMED!

HA HA! ANYWAY...

...in front of the church that was in blazes!

The automatons started dancing...

These demonic beings had sent my son and all the villagers...

...to hell, without so much as a second thought... without even a shred of emotion.

And I...

I was watching my daughter suffer in silence.

I kept my eyes open to engrave this image in my heart forever!

VVVVH...

THEY REALLY THINK THEY CAN GET AWAY WITH IT?!

LET THEM TRY THAT ONE MORE TIME! I'LL DESTROY THEM ALL!

THE BASTARDS!

SPAT

I'M JUST INTERESTED. I'M NOT HERE TO COMMISERATE WITH HER.

AND YOU, YOU ASK THE QUESTION JUST LIKE THAT!

YOU REALLY HAVE NO COMPASSION FOR OTHERS!

THIS HAS GOTTA BE PAINFUL FOR LUCILLE!

HEY, GUY!

BY THE WAY, LUCILLE...HOW DID YOU BECOME A "SHIROGANE"?

THEN ONE DAY, A SORT OF HEALER APPEARED ...

TEN YEARS WENT BY...

...

IT IS ALRIGHT, NARUMI. THAT IS ALL HISTORY NOW.

...AND HE CALLED HIMSELF "SHIROGANE".

This man was dressed very strangely...

BLACKOUT

DA DA DA DA

WE'RE HERE, MASTER ARLEQUINO.

AH! IT'S OVER THERE!

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"ONCE UPON A TIME / IV"

DA DA

THAT WAS QUICK.

WELL...

WWWOM

BUT... HOW DID YOU BECOME A "SHIRO-GANE"...

...LUCILLE?

NOW WE KNOW THAT THE ALITOMATONS HAVE DESTROYED YOUR VILLAGE AND SPREAD ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME.

HM?

NARUMI.

THERE IS TOO MUCH CONFLICTING INFORMATION ABOUT THAT DISEASE... ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.

...IT PREVENTS US FROM DYING!

"CONFLICTING INFORMATION"?! I'VE SUFFERED FROM ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME!

I KNOW VERY WELL THE PAIN IT CAN CAUSE WHEN YOU CAN'T MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH!

YES... BUT YOU'RE STILL WRONG. THE REAL DIFFICULTY WITH THAT DISEASE IS NOT THE PAIN IT CAN PROVOKE, BUT THE FACT THAT...

Three years passed ...

Then five years ...

The smell in the air of burnt bodies finally disappeared...

But...

The automatons left after the slaughter.

Even so, people affected by the syndrome weren't dying!

Bodies of some became completely inert.

The attack which kept people from breathing was perpetually happening, combined with the epilepsy attack.

GULP

CAN YOU EVEN UNDERSTAND THE INTENSITY OF SUCH PAIN?

But the death that should have relieved them from their pain never showed up!

YES, THEY DID... BY CHANCE, SOME OF THEM HAD SEEN THEIR BODIES FALLING INTO DISREPAIR... THE RAIN, THE FROST, AND ALL THE ELEMENTS THEY WERE EXPOSED TO WERE SLOWLY REDUCING THEIR BODIES TO NOTHING.

THEN, NOBODY DIED FROM IT?

HHH

H

...were unfortunately sheltered when our strength began to decline.

Marie, Tania, and a dozen villagers including me...

But... My daughter, Angelique ...

IN FALL, OUR SAVIOR ARRIVED.

AND THEN, SIX YEARS AFTER THE EVENTS ...

The beverage he made us drink was soft and warm... it relieved us from our pain almost instantaneously.

SLURP

I opened my eyes to look at him.

A... AAH...

I'M SORRY I DON'T HAVE MUCH LEFT

...

DON'T BE SCARED BY MY JARS I'M KIND OF A DUCTOR

YES

I told him everything.

The man in black ... The castle ... The automatons ... and the slaughter ...

I was already getting better.

Then he came with me to the castle...

He listened to me without saying a single word.

There ...

IK

There was a big oven.

And the room was filled with containers and weird instruments.

But he told me that there would be nobody there.

I didn't want to go with him at first because I was really scared.

CLOC

AN "ETERNAL BEING".

HERE, SOMEONE PERFORMED ALCHEMICAL EXPERIMENTS IN ORDER TO CREATE...

WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

WHAT'S REALLY SURPRISING IS THAT HE USED SOMETHING WHICH IS THE QUIN-TESSENCE OF ALCHEMY.

FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN SO FAR, HE'S ALREADY SUCCEEDED IN CREATING AT LEAST ONE OF THOSE PERFECT CREATURES.

THAT MAN IN BLACK WAS LOOKING TO CREATE PERFECT BEINGS WHICH NEVER GET OLD. IN OTHER TERMS, INDEPENDENT AUTOMA-TONS.

WHAT?

YES... BUT I DON'T THINK IT MEANS ANYTHING TO YOU.

THE QUINTES-SENCE... OF ALCHEMY?

IT MEANS THAT HE COULD MAKE AQUA VITAE IN IT.

YES.

VH...

YOU'VE TOLD ME THAT THE WELL WAS ENLIGHTED BY A RED GLEAM.

...EXIST?!

BUT... HOW CAN SUCH A THING...

THAT ELIXIR CAN EVEN INSPIRE WITH LIFE AUTOMATONS MADE OF PIECES OF MACHINERY.

HOW'S THAT POSSIBLE?

IT'S AN ELIXIR WHICH HEALS ANY WOUND OR ILLNESS. THAT'S WHAT I MADE YOU DRINK.

AQUA... VITAE? WHAT'S THAT?

IT'S MADE THANKS TO THIS...

IT'S CALLED A "SOFT STONE".

IT'S THE QUINTESSENCE OF THAT ART.

OWNING THAT MYSTERIOUS STONE IS THE PROOF THAT ONE HAS PERFECTLY MASTERED ALCHEMY.

IT'S TRUE. IT'S SOFT... AND A LITTLE BIT WARM.

TOUCH IT.

ALL THAT REPRESENTS THE ULTIMATE MASTERY THAT ALCHEMISTS TRY TO ACQUIRE.

THE SOFT STONE ALSO ALLOWS ONE TO TRANSFORM A SIMPLE PIECE OF COPPER INTO PURE GOLD BY STRAIGHT CONTACT.

IT GIVES LONGEVITY AND PERFECT HEALTH.

THE AQUA VITAE, WHICH CAN BE OBTAINED BY TRANSFORMING WATER THANKS TO THAT STONE, IS AN ALL-POWERFUL ELIXIR.

I HEARD ABOUT YOUR VILLAGE DURING ONE OF MY NUMEROUS TRAVELS.

WE'VE SET UP RULES AMONGST US.

I'M AN ITINERANT ALCHEMIST ...

THEN, YOU... YOU'RE ONE...

...MUST BE REPAIRED BY ANOTHER ALCHEMIST.

DAMAGES CAUSED BY AN ALCHEMIST...

FRAN-CINE.

WHY DON'T YOU LAUGH?

GGH...

IN ANY CASE, IN ORDER TO PALLIATE THE FLAWS OF THOSE CREATURES, HE INDULGED IN ATROCIOUS CRIMES...

I DON'T KNOW WHY.

...WAS ABLE TO CREATE AUTOMATONS IN THIS PLACE.

IN MY OPINION, THAT MAN IN BLACK ...

BUT THEY MUST'VE BEEN IMPERFECT.

VLU
VLU TC
VLU TCH

HOP
HOP

THAT MY VILLAGE ...

WAS DESTROYED ...

JUST FOR THAT PURPOSE?!

YOU MEAN...

SCHRK SCHRK SCHRK

REVENGE !!

HH !!

HEU

RE... VENGE!

HEU

THE DISEASE WILL END UP DEFEATING YOU IF YOU STAY LIKE THIS.

I'VE MADE YOU DRINK A SMALL QUANTITY OF AQUA VITAE.

NOW LET ME ASK YOU ONE QUESTION.

DO YOU REALLY WISH TO TAKE REVENGE?

Or slowly die without being able to do anything...?

Do you wish to live and fight the man in black and the automatons...

I WANNA AVENGE THEM ALL!!

WHAT THEY DID TO OUR VILLAGE...

WHAT THEY DID TO MY SON...

I CAN'T...

...

FORGET

...

GOOD.

I'M GONNA HAVE TO ACT ON MY OWN RESPONSI-BILITIES, THEN.

BAM

SPLAOUF

BLOUP

PLIC PLOP

SPLATCH

VLAN

YOU'LL BE ABLE TO SAVE ALL THE INHABITANTS OF YOUR VILLAGE WITH THAT QUANTITY OF AQUA VITAE.

BY THROWING THE SOFT STONE IN THE WELL!

I'VE CREATED AQUA VITAE, THE ALL-POWERFUL ELIXIR...

CHHA

CHHA

WHAT'S ...

DON'T THANK ME!!

HOW CAN I THANK...

IS THAT... TRUE?!

THERE'S NO OTHER WAY. IT'S LIKE THIS.

I...

BUT ...

...YOU'LL ALSO HAVE TO ACCEPT DEDICATING YOUR LIFE TO THE TOTAL DE-STRUCTION OF AUTOMATONS!

BY ACCEPTING DRINKING THAT WATER...

ONLY THOSE WHO'LL ACCEPT WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF THE FACTS...

IT'LL BE YOUR TURN TO PUT THE SAME QUESTION TO THE OTHER VILLAGERS.

...WILL BE ALLOWED TO DRINK THE AQUA VITAE.

TOMORROW, COME BACK AND DRAW WATER FROM THE WELL.

CLING

EVEN IF WE SURVIVE, HOW DO YOU WANT US TO FIGHT THOSE TERRIFYING CREATURES?

WE'RE JUST PEACEFUL PEASANTS.

BUT...

TOMORROW, YOU'LL OPEN THE SAFE.

WHAT'S THIS?

MAY I ASK YOU WHO YOU ARE?

MISTER... YOU SAVED US THANKS TO YOUR STRANGE ART BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF YOUR GREAT KINDNESS.

NOW, GO. YOUR DAUGHTER IS WAITING FOR YOU.

I GOT INTO ALCHEMY BECAUSE I ALSO WISHED...

...TO MAKE MY PUPPETS MORE "HUMAN".

A LONG TIME AGO, I WAS BORN IN CHINA...

IN A FAMILY OF FAMOUS PUPPETEERS.

...IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.

I KNOW THAT...

NOW...

IT'S "SHIROGANE", WHICH MEANS "WHITE METAL" IN JAPANESE...

ONE DAY, I WENT TO A COUNTRY NAMED JAPAN. PEOPLE THERE GAVE ME A NICKNAME I LIKE...

I drank the Aqua Vitae and opened the safe.

The next day, the man had disappeared... Forever.

Inside, there was... A sort of giant puppet.

ARLEQUINO!

WHAT AN INTERESTING STORY!

WHO'S HERE?!

BLACKOUT

In fact, a strange rose perfume hung in the air...

That well was filled with a silvery fluid that had a pink tint.

I came to the well the next day, as that alchemist had requested.

ACT VIII : KARAKURI • MACHINERY

"ARLEQUINO'S ARRIVAL"

Then there was also this strange puppet.

WHAT RUBBISH !!!

I DON'T SEE WHY YOU ARE GETTING SO UPSET, NARUMI ...

...WAS COMPLETELY IRRESPON-SIBLE!!!

THAT CRACKPOT ALCHEMIST ...

SHE HAS 580 BASIC MOVEMENTS, MULTIPLIED BY AS MANY FINGERS AND TOES AS YOU HAVE!!! AN IDIOT LIKE YOU WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO MANIPULATE HER!!!

MY OLYMPIA ?!

TELL ME, GUY... THAT BIG DOLL OF YOURS, "OLYMPIC WHAT-CHAMACALLIT"... CAN YOU LEND IT TO ME? I WANNA USE IT!

INDEED ...

I GUESS YOU'D NEVER SEEN THAT KIND OF PUPPET BEFORE, RIGHT?

HEHE... AND YET, THAT WAS NEVER A PROBLEM FOR US.

IF THAT ALCHEMIST KNEW SO MUCH ABOUT LIFE, HE SHOULDA KNOWN THAT SIMPLE PEASANTS LEFT BY THEMSELVES WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO TAKE REVENGE BY FIGHTING THOSE AUTOMATONS!

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT! SO THAT ALCHEMIST FORCED HIS BIG PUPPET INTO LUCILLE'S HANDS, THEN SAID, "I'LL CURE YOU, THEN YOU FIGURE THE REST OUT FOR YOURSELF"!

OBVIOUSLY! YOU CAN SEE THAT HIS HAIR AND EVEN HIS EYES DID NOT CHANGE COLOR! MAYBE THE AQUA VITAE DOESN'T HAVE ANY EFFECT ON IDIOTS...

SAY, GUY... IF NARUMI IS ASKING THIS QUESTION, THAT MEANS HE IS NOT LIKE US AT ALL.

AH?! WHY IS THAT?

AND I IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTOOD WHY THE ALCHEMIST HAD NOT EXPLAINED ANYTHING.

THUS, I DRANK THE AQUA VITAE FROM THE WELL.

?

YOU ARE NOT CALM, NARUMI!

STOP THOSE HUSH-HUSH CONVER-SATIONS! RIGHT NOW, I'M KEEPING MY CALM!

EXPLAIN TO ME, NOW!

ALCHEMICAL KNOWLEDGE!

A SURGE OF INFORMATION APPEARED IN MY HEAD.

NUMEROUS LANGUAGES!

TRAVELING AND SURVIVAL TECH-NIQUES!

I had become someone else.

At that exact moment ...

AND WEAK-NESSES.

WAY OF THINKING ...

CHAR-ACTER-ISTICS ...

THEIR MATERI-ALS...

THE BASIC STRUCTURES OF AUTO-MATONS!

AND ...

I ALSO FELT...

...IN ORDER TO DECIMATE THE AUTO-MATONS, BY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF EACH OF THEIR WEAK-NESSES.

AND ALSO THE VARIOUS MANIPULATION TECHNIQUES OF STRINGED PUPPETS WHICH HAD BEEN CREATED...

"AND AUTOMATONS TO SIMPLE PUPPETS!"

"DUST MUST RETURN TO DUST"

It was an overwhelming feeling! This feeling of hate inside me was without a doubt much stronger than the combined anger of every inhabitant of my village!

ALL AUTO-MATONS!

DESTROY THEM!

ANNIHILATE THEM!

WE WERE POSSESSED BY THE UNWAVERING WILL OF A SINGLE PERSON!

ALL THOSE WHO DRANK THE AQUA VITAE FOUND THEMSELVES IN THE SAME STATE AS ME...

To pursue automatons and destroy them...

...became the only joy in our lives.

We progressively lost all human feeling...

As well as all desire.

WAIT A MINUTE... THEN WHAT ABOUT ME?!

I WAS SAVED BY THE AQUA VITAE!

I HAVE ALREADY TOLD YOU ABOUT THIS, TOO.

BUT YOU CAN ALSO ABSORB KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS FROM SOMEONE ELSE?

SO... BY DRINKING THE AQUA VITAE...

NOT ONLY DOES IT CURE ZONAPHA'S SYNDROME,

I'M HITTING YOU!

POF!

BUT IT MAY ALSO BE BECAUSE IMBECILES AND INFERIOR BEINGS CANNOT...

I SUPPOSE IT IS LARGELY BECAUSE OF YOUR ARTIFICIAL ARM, WHICH MUST HAVE ABSORBED THE MAJORITY OF THE AQUA VITAE THAT YOU SWALLOWED.

YOU ARE THE ONLY SHIROGANE WHO IS NOT DOMINATED BY THE AQUA VITAE.

I THINK YOU ARE AN EXCEPTION, THAT IS ALL!

WAS IT...

SO, THIS "SPIRIT" THAT DOMINATED YOU, WHO WAS IT?

BUT...

...AFTER DRINKING THE AQUA VITAE.

WE SHIROGANES QUICKLY UNDERSTOOD, THANKS TO THE KNOWLEDGE WHICH BECAME OURS...

...ALL CALL OURSELVES "SHIRO-GANE"?

IN YOUR OPINION, WHY DO WE, DESTROYERS OF ALITO-MATONS...

NARUMI.

AQUA VITAE IS NOT JUST AN "ALL-POWERFUL" LIQUID.

A LARGE QUANTITY OF AQUA VITAE CAN MELT ANY SUBSTANCE

IRON

WOOD

AND EVEN A HUMAN BEING

IN ORDER TO CREATE GOLD FROM ANOTHER METAL THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ALCHEMY

ONE MUST FIRST MELT METAL

WHEN SUCH A THING HAPPENS, THE AQUA VITAE CONTAINS THE SOUL OF THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN DISSOLVED IN IT FOREVER.

THAT IS WHY WE ARE TECHNICALLY NOT "INDIVIDUALS" ANYMORE.

WE DRANK THE AQUA VITAE AS WELL AS THE "SPIRIT" OF THIS TRAVELING ALCHEMIST

THOSE WHO THEN DRINK THIS BREW ARE DOMINATED BY THE WILL OF THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN DISSOLVED IN IT

WE BECAME REPLICAS OF "SHIROGANE"!

PLANG

WHO'S THERE ?!

!

YOU, THE NEW SHIRO-GANE...

THAT WAS A MOST INTERESTING STORY.

VOLONG

THIS IS OUR FIRST ENCOUNTER.

MY NAME IS ARLEQUINO...

AND I AM ONE OF THE OLDEST SERVANTS OF MISTRESS FRANCINE!

HOW DID YOU GET IN HERE?

BUT...

THAT'S RIGHT! BUT TODAY...

...WE WERE ABLE TO GET IN SO EASILY!

HI HI HI HI! YOUR SECURITY SYSTEM IS GETTING OLD!

IN THE OLD DAYS, THE SHIROGANE HEADQUARTERS WERE IMPREGNABLE!

I AM KENISS!

THE RULES OF ETIQUETTE DICTATE THAT WE INTRODUCE OURSELVES!

Shi

BALENG

AND I, ANOSS!

VIOU VIOU

VIOU

HUH?! DAMN YOU, GUY!

WE'RE GONNA CRUSH YOU!!!

YOU, TOO, LITTLE AMATEUR JUGGLERS!

ARLEQUINO... IT HAS BEEN A WHILE!

GRRR... YOU'RE MEMBERS OF THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS?!

AH...

KENISS, ANOSS... I ONLY CAME TO SEE WHAT THAT BIG ASIAN SHIROGANE LOOKED LIKE.

YES...

TAN...

TAN...

THEY DO NOT KNOW HOW TO BEHAVE.

TAN...

MY APOLO-GIES.

THE ONES WHO PLUNGED HER VILLAGE INTO ETERNAL HELL?!

...THAT'S ONE OF THE MONSTERS THAT LUCILLE JUST TALKED ABOUT?

SO...

ZO

I'M HAVING TROUBLE HOLDING BACK AFTER WHAT I JUST HEARD...

WHAT DO I CARE?! I'M WARNING YOU, DON'T GET ANY CLOSER TO ME...

...HAD BLACK HAIR AND EYES?

DID YOU KNOW THAT OUR CREATOR ALSO...

NOR ARE YOUR EYES!

HO HOOO! YOUR HAIR IS NOT SILVER-COLORED!

OLYMPIA!

NARUMI, MOVE OVER! SHIROGANES DO NOT NEED TO SPEAK WITH AUTOMATONS!

WE RESPECT THE RULES OF ETIQUETTE... IF YOU ACT THIS WAY, KENISS AND ANOSS WILL HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF YOU.

YEEHAW!

HAVE FUN!

ARLE-QUINO!

PFFT ...

LUCILLE, SURELY YOU HAVE NOT FORGOTTEN...

...THAT WEAPONS ARE POWERLESS AGAINST US.

SHIC

GONE FISHING.

AND YOUR RIDICULOUS STRINGED PUPPET?

I KNOW IT VERY WELL.

...TO SHOW MYSELF IN FRONT OF MY HUSBAND, MY SON AND ALL THE VILLAGERS, WHEN I JOIN THEM IN HELL!!!

I WILL NOT HAVE THE COURAGE ...

IF I DO NOT TRY ANYTHING AGAINST YOU RIGHT NOW...

DAH!

GRRR!

DAMMIT! I DIDN'T EVEN SEE HIM MOVE! HOW DID HE MOVE SO FAST?!

GO HOME

THIS IS WHERE WE PART WAYS.

SAH

IT'S TOO BAD, LUCILLE...

HOOO? INTER-ESTING!

LET'S RUMBLE!

BLACKOUT

IT WAS NO BIGGIE!

NOW, WE'RE GONNA AVOID YOUR LITTLE DOLL'S MOVES AND KILL YOU, NO PROBLEM!

HM... I HAVE TO SAY THAT YOU ARE QUITE RESOURCEFUL! YOU MANAGED TO ENTER WITHOUT DRAWING ATTENTION!

NARUMI! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?! HELP ME!

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY

"THE SOFT STONE"

I'VE GOT ENOUGH ON MY HANDS!

DOOM

SHUT UP!

ZAN

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"THE SOFT STONE"

GOOH

"CRUSHING FIST"!

GNG

THAT HIT WAS PERFECT! NOW...

WHAT ?!

VHH...

VERY WELL... I WILL NOW ALSO ATTACK YOU WITH MY HAND.

SO THAT'S THE FAMOUS "CHI" ATTACK THAT USES A HUMAN'S VITAL ENERGY?

I HAVE BEEN WANTING SO MUCH TO SEE IT UP CLOSE!

SHIT!

ZAH

SCHEEE

YOU COULD HAVE AT LEAST WARNED ME!

HE HAS CONTINUALLY IMPROVED HIMSELF OVER THE YEARS BY PERFECTING HIS ARTIFICIAL BODY. HE MOST ASSUREDLY MADE IT IMPERVIOUS TO THIS AND MANY OTHER TYPES OF ATTACK...

ARLEQUINO IS ONE OF THE MOST ANCIENT ALITOMATONS.

NARUMI!!

... SLAP.

THAT WAS A SIMPLE ...

WE "ANCIENT" AUTOMATONS WHO HAVE SERVED MISTRESS FRANCINE SINCE THE BEGINNING HAVE TIRELESSLY IMPROVED OUR BODIES.

LUCILLE IS RIGHT ...

REPLACE HUMANS?

IT WOULD BE INTERESTING,

BUT YOU DO NOT REALLY KNOW US...

BY SUCKING THEIR BLOOD?! BY SPREADING ZONAPHA SYNDROME?! HOW MANY OF THOSE HUMANS HAVE YOU KILLED?! ALL YOU WANT IS TO REPLACE THEM! AIN'T THAT RIGHT?!

... "RESEMBLE HUMANS"?!

IN ORDER TO MORE CLOSELY RESEMBLE HUMANS...

...TO BECOME HUMAN. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IS...

...TO MAKE MISTRESS FRANCINE LAUGH!

WE AUTOMATONS DO EVERY-THING...

THAT'S NOT TRUE!

MAYBE I DON'T KNOW YOU... BUT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING IS A JOKE!

TAH

SLAMMING

BECAUSE YOUR LITTLE FRANCINE IS NOTHING MORE THAN A SIMPLE PUPPET!

AQUA VITAE, THE PINNACLE OF ALCHEMY, IS AN ALMIGHTY ELIXIR THAT IMBUES HUMANS WITH AN ULTIMATE VITAL FORCE.

BUT... IT DOES NOT GIVE A "SUPERIOR LIFE" ONLY TO HUMANS!

IT ALSO GIVES LIFE TO US MACHINES!!!

MISTRESS FRANCINE...

...IS THE ONLY AUTOMATON CREATED WITH AQUA VITAE.

SHE IS DIFFERENT FROM US!

SHE IS ALREADY... HUMAN!

THIS IS GOOD...

THANKS TO THE VITAL FLUIDS I DEVISED...

I HAVE MANAGED TO GIVE YOU...

...YOUR OWN MIND.

Thanks to the fluids she had created, my mind was clear.

Those words were the first I ever heard from Mistress Francine's mouth.

...than when our creator in black had ordered us to destroy the village.

I was able to take in, feel, and understand everything much more clearly...

HE... IS NO LONGER WITH US...

...

WHERE IS... YOUR MASTER?

VHH...

...NO MATTER WHAT HE DID... SO HE LEFT.

HE UNDER-STOOD...

...THAT I WOULD NEVER LAUGH...

TO FIND A WAY TO MAKE MYSELF LAUGH.

I AM LEAVING ON A JOURNEY ...

WHEN I LAUGH, OUR CREATOR ...

...WILL SURELY COME BACK TO OUR SIDE.

THEY ALLOWED ME TO GIVE YOU YOUR OWN WILL.

BECAUSE OF THAT, I WAS ABLE TO CREATE ARTIFICIAL VITAL FLUIDS.

ALTHOUGH THESE FLUIDS CANNOT MATCH THE AQUA VITAE FROM WHICH I WAS CREATED,

I STUDIED ALL THE SCIENCES HE PRACTICED

AND READ THE BOOKS AND NOTES HE LEFT BEHIND.

HELP ME FIND THE WAY TO FINALLY MAKE ME LAUGH!

COME WITH ME!!!

BY THE WAY, YOU STILL HAVE TO SUCK HUMAN BLOOD TO SURVIVE!!!

HAH! ALL THAT BECAUSE SHE GAVE YOU LIFE!

WE WERE, HOW TO SAY IT... ENTHUSED!

GH- GHH-

UNFORTUNATELY, SHE NEVER DID... NO MATTER WHAT WE TRIED.

...TO MAKE MISTRESS FRANCINE LAUGH.

WE WERE MODELED AFTER CHARACTERS FROM THE COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE...

ZAH...

BA-

NOTE: COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE = ANCIENT ITALIAN COMIC IMPROVISATIONAL THEATER

BUT MISTRESS FRANCINE GAVE US OUR OWN WILL

...AND A CLEAR GOAL TO STRIVE FOR.

WE COULD NOT ACHIEVE OUR MISSION.

WE NO LONGER HAD A REASON TO EXIST.

BELIEVE ME, IT'S POINTLESS TO TRY TO BECOME HUMAN!!!

EVEN IF ONE DAY YOU REALLY LOOK HUMAN, YOU'LL STILL BE SIMPLE PUPPETS!!!

HAH!

BONG!!

100H

YOU'RE GONNA DIE, GUY!!!

HERE WE COME!!!

ARLE-QUINO! I FORBID YOU!

YOU DON'T WANT ME TO KILL THEM? IS THAT IT, LUCILLE?

CAN WE KILL THEM?

HI HI HI! MASTER ARLE-QUINO!

AS YOU WISH... THE TALL ONE IS STARTING TO BORE ME.

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING TO HELP ME FOR?! THEY ARE VERY STRONG!

THAT'LL TEACH YOU TO BOAST ALL THE TIME! FIGURE IT OUT BY YOURSELF!

GRR...

CH...

YOU KNOW WEAPONS ARE USELESS AGAINST ME...

WELL... HOW DO YOU PLAN TO STOP ME?

I TOLD YOU, NARUMI... YOU SWALLOWED THE LAST DROPS OF AQUA VITAE IN OUR POSSESSION.

WHAT?!

...THAT IS REALLY PITIFUL, DON'T YOU THINK? BUT... IT IS TRUE THAT IF WE KILL THEM, ONLY OLD AND SHRIVELED SHIROGANES WILL REMAIN!

A PUPPETEER WITHOUT A PUPPET...

...THERE CANNOT BE...

...ANY NEW SHIRO-GANES.

BUT... IF THERE IS NO MORE AQUA VITAE,

UNTIL NOW, WHEN PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM ZONAPHA SYNDROME DRANK OUR AQUA VITAE, THEY BECAME "SHIROGANES," DESTROYERS OF AUTOMATONS.

SO, WITH ALL THAT KNOWLEDGE, YOU COULD JUST MAKE A NEW SOFT STONE AND MORE AQUA VITAE!

I DON'T GET IT. LUCILLE WAS SAYING THAT ALL THOSE WHO DRANK THE AQUA VITAE ACQUIRED ALL OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THAT TRAVELING ALCHEMIST! THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID, RIGHT?!

THE KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING THE SOFT STONE REMAINS FUZZY IN OUR MINDS. THERE IS NOT A SINGLE SHIROGANE WHO REMEMBERS ANYTHING ABOUT IT!

HUH?

NO, THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE.

AND THE SOFT STONE AT ITS ORIGIN !!!

HA HA HA! HOW AMUSING!

BOTH SHIROGANES AND AUTO-MATONS STILL NEED THE AQUA VITAE...

AND WHAT GOOD DOES IT DO YOU TO USE THE AQUA VITAE TO BECOME HUMAN?! WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

WE TRAVELED THE WORLD FOR A LONG TIME.

LOOKING FOR WAYS AND CLUES TO MAKING MISTRESS FRANCINE LAUGH.

WE HAVE TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY.

ALONG THE WAY, WE CREATED INNUMERABLE COMPANIONS...

...HOPING THAT ONE OF THEM WOULD ONE DAY MAKE OUR DEAR MISTRESS LAUGH.

BUT ALL WAS FOR NALIGHT.

YES, AND IT IS QUITE RARE FOR US TO AGREE ON SOMETHING.

THAT WAS A LOSING BET FROM THE START, RIGHT, GUY?

THE MIRACLE NEVER HAPPENED.

BUT EVEN WITH THAT,

...WE FINALLY HAD A BREAKTHROUGH!

WHILE STUDYING SOME BOOKS WRITTEN BY HUMANS ABOUT LAUGHTER...

LATER,

MISTRESS FRANCINE BECAME HUMAN THANKS TO THE AQUA VITAE. WE NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND HER THOUGHTS! OTHERWISE...

...WE WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO MAKE HER LAUGH!!!

"IN ORDER TO CREATE LAUGHTER ...

...ONE MUST KNOW THE MIND OF THE OTHER."

...WE WOULD SURELY UNDERSTAND THE HEART OF OUR PRINCESS...

...AND FINALLY MAKE HER LAUGH!!!

THUS... BY BECOMING HUMAN OURSELVES BY USING THE AQUA VITAE...

I SEE...

EXACTLY LIKE YOU DID IN LUCILLE'S VILLAGE...

SLAC

SUCKING HUMAN BLOOD AND SPREADING THAT DAMN SICKNESS?

SO THAT'S WHY...

...YOU CONTINUE TRAVEL-ING?

YOU'RE USELESS... THE WORLD DOESN'T NEED YOU!

HA HA HA!

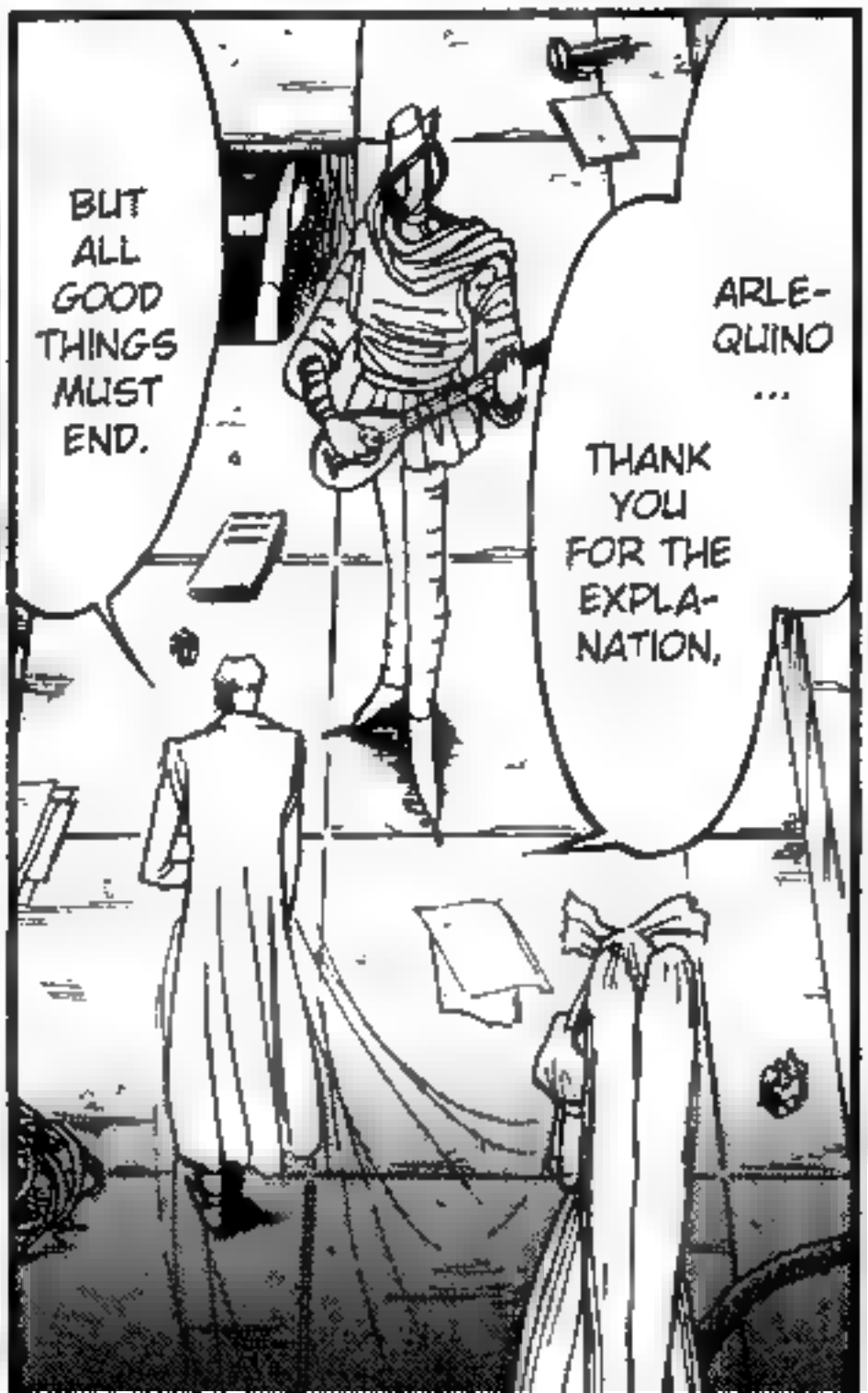
YOU WERE POWER-LESS BEFORE, AND NOW YOU ACT LIKE A BIG SHOT?! THAT'S HILARIOUS!!!

OOH!

ZING

DU
MAL

YOU WERE PRETEND-ING?!


BUT ALL GOOD THINGS MUST END.
ARLE-QUINO ...
THANK YOU FOR THE EXPLA-NATION.

AH ...

MAYBE...
AHH

GRRR

BLACKOUT

ACT VIII : KARAKURI * MACHINERY
"TEMPORARY CURTAIN DROP"

IT'S A LITTLE LATE!

THESE TWO PUPPETS ARE TOO WEAK!

KENISS, ANOSS, YOU UNDERESTIMATED THEM... IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT!

WE'RE GONNA KILL 'EM!!!

...

UHM... I WASN'T PRETEND-ING...

NO AUTOMATON SHALL DISRESPECT THE NAME OF GUY-CHRISTOPHER RECH!

I KNOW... THEY ONLY CAME TO SEE WHO NARUMI WAS. THEY HEARD OF A NEW SHIROGANE, WHEN WE ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE ANY MORE AQUA VITAE.

GUY...

...A NEW SOFT STONE, THE SOURCE OF AQUA VITAE.

...WHETHER WE SHIRO-GANE HAD OBTAINED ...

YES, THAT IS SURELY IT. THEY ONLY CAME TO SEE...

UHM, LUCILLE... I DON'T UNDER-STAND.

THE SOFT STONE STILL EXISTS? I THOUGHT IT WAS GONE.

HA HA...

IS THAT WHAT YOU THINK?

LOST IT?!

...

SO... THAT PIECE OF THE STONE, YOU...

IN REALITY,

WE FOUND A PIECE OF THE STONE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WELL.

I WILL TELL YOU HOW IT HAPPENED!

HA HA HA HA !!!

RATHER INTERESTING, IS IT NOT, NARUMI?!

AND LET ME BUTCHER GUY!

IT'S THE FIRST TIME I'VE EVER BEEN HUMILIATED LIKE THAT!

MASTER ARLEQUINO, I BEG OF YOU!

LET ME KILL NARUMI!

CALM DOWN!

KENISS, ANOSS! YOU ARE TOO IMPATIENT!

WE WERE ALSO LOOKING FOR A SOFT STONE,

BECAUSE IT ALLOWS THE CREATION OF AQUA VITAE.

WE AUTOMATONS HAVE TRAVELED THE WORLD OVER, LOOKING FOR THE AQUA VITAE, BECAUSE WE YEARN TO BECOME LIKE HUMANS.

...SAID SOMETHING.

...ONE OF THE SHIROGANE HUNTING US...

ONE DAY, ABOUT 15 YEARS AFTER WE'D STARTED TRAVELING...

...BY THE SHIROGANE, IN A SPECIAL CONTAINER."

"THE SOFT STONE IS BEING KEPT...

FIERCE BATTLES TOOK PLACE BETWEEN ALITOMATONS AND SHIROGANE.

THEREAFTER,

...

YOU HAD THE STONE?!

I DON'T GET IT ANYMORE!

IT WAS THEIR ONLY HOPE OF BECOMING HUMAN.

THE ALITOMATONS' OBJECTIVE, OF COURSE, WAS THE STONE.

OF COURSE, THE SHIRO-GANE WHO GAVE THAT INFORMATION DID IT ON PURPOSE.

IT WAS THE ONLY THING CAPABLE OF CREATING AQUA VITAE, WHICH ALLOWED US TO CREATE MORE SHIROGANE.

BUT WE SHIROGANE NEEDED TO PROTECT IT.

THE SHIROGANE WOULD NOT HAVE TO PURSUE THEM ONE BY ONE ANYMORE. THEY FLOCKED TO THE CASTLE IN HORDES, ATTRACTED BY THE STONE!

...WOULD ATTRACT THE AUTOMATONS.

SPREADING THE NEWS ABOUT THE SOFT STONE...

...BECAUSE ...

...ESCAPED OUR GRASP AT THE LAST SECOND, EACH AND EVERY TIME...

THAT WHICH WE COVETED SO MUCH...

THERE WERE MORE THAN 500 SUCH BATTLES IN THE PAST.

BUT WE COULD NEVER REACH IT!

YOU, LUCILLE ...

...WERE ALWAYS IN FRONT OF THIS "CONTAINER".

OF COURSE!

...

IT'S KINDA WEIRD TO BE USING THAT WORD!

SAY,

YOU GUYS'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT A "CONTAINER" FOR A WHILE.

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO KEEP IT IN ITS ORIGINAL STATE.

IT EVAPORATES WHEN IT IS EXPOSED TO OPEN AIR FOR TOO LONG.

HUH?

THE SOFT STONE HAS STRANGE PROPERTIES.

SO, WHAT DID YOU KEEP IT IN?

IF IT HAD BEEN PLACED IN A BOX OR A COMMON FLASK...

IT WOULD HAVE COMPLETELY DISAPPEARED WITHIN 15 DAYS.

HUH?!

I WILL HELP YOU... IT'S A CONTAINER MADE FROM THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS, IN EXACT PROPORTIONS: 62.6% OXYGEN, 19.5% CARBON, 9.3% HYDROGEN, 1.42% CALCIUM, ETC...

HLANG

TAKE A GUESS!

THAT IS THE MOST INTEREST-ING POINT, NARUMI!

HA HA HA!

IT'S THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF A HUMAN BODY!

IN THE BODY OF AN ADULT, THE STONE COULD HAVE CAUSED A REACTION.

CONSEQUENTLY, WE HAD TO HIDE IT... IN THE BODY OF A CHILD.

A HUMAN... BODY?!

HAA

HAA

...AS A CONTAINER FOR THE SOFT STONE?!

ANGELICA WAS THE ONLY CHILD TO SURVIVE THE MASSACRE IN OUR VILLAGE.

WE HAD NO CHOICE.

PLEASE, ALLOW US TO KILL THEM!!!

MASTER! IT'S NO USE CHATTING ANY LONGER!

WHAT HAPPENED TO HER, THEN?

SO?

KENISS, ANOSS, YOU MAY TAKE CARE OF THEM IF YOU WISH.

AFTERWARDS... SHE LIVED IN A FARAWAY COUNTRY... AND DIED APPROXIMATELY 18 YEARS AGO.

ANGELICA SERVED AS BAIT TO ATTRACT AUTOMATONS... AND DID SO MORE THAN 500 TIMES!

HAHAHAHA

SHE DIED IN YOUR COUNTRY, NARUMI.

HUH?!

STOP DAYDREAMING, NARUMI!!

SHE DIED... IN JAPAN?!

TOKYO

YOU'RE GONNA DIE!!!

AND THE STONE IN ANGEL-ICA'S BODY?

GLORG... BLURG...

GUH... GUHAH!

YOME!

IS IT NOT, LUCILLE?

HE HE... THAT...

IS THE SOURCE OF AN EVEN GREATER CONFLICT BETWEEN AUTOMATONS AND SHIRO-GANE!

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

...OF THIS FAMOUS STONE!

EVERYONE LOST TRACK ...

NARUMI!! MOVE!

THE SOFT STONE IS VITAL FOR ALL OF US!

WHEN THE SHIROGANE SAW THAT THE STONE WAS NOT IN ANGELICA'S BODY ANYMORE, THEY PANICKED.

SINCE THEN, THE ALITOMATONS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES LOOKING FOR THE SOFT STONE ANYMORE.

GUY!

POF!

MASTER... ARLEQUINO... PLEASE HELP US!

GAAAH!

IT HAS BEEN A RACE TO FIND THE SOFT STONE FIRST.

RIGHT, LUCILLE ?

SINCE THAT DAY,

BETWEEN US AND THE SHIROGANE,

I HOPE YOU ARE AT LEAST STILL ABLE TO FLY!

COME HERE, YOU TWO! WE'RE GOING HOME! I AM REALLY ASHAMED OF YOU!

YRYOW...

YRYOW...

DID YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO TELL US?

ARLE-QUINO ...

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHY YOU CAME HERE.

HMM...

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

POH POH POH

GUY, NARUMI ...

SEE YOU SOON...

HEY! WAIT A MINUTE!

SLAMMM

BY THE WAY, I ALMOST FORGOT.

NARUMI, NEXT TIME WE MEET, I HOPE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO HIT ME WITH A LITTLE MORE CONVICTION.

HERE ARE THE WORDS OF THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNEW WHERE THE STONE WAS, WHEN IT DISAP-PEARED IN JAPAN...

MANY SHIROGANE HAVE LOOKED FOR THIS STONE, TO NO AVAIL.

HM... HOW CAN ONE SEARCH EFFICIENTLY WITH SUCH AMBIGUOUS CLUES?!

"THE SOFT STONE...

...IS WITH THE ONE WITH A GOOD SMILE"

LUCILLE ...

H H H

...HAS DEVISED AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO FIND IT!

THE MIDNIGHT CIRCUS...

BLACKOUT

INTERMISSION "SMILES"

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I LIVED WITH MY MOM IN A SMALL APARTMENT...

MOM HAD A PART-TIME JOB, BUT I WAS OFTEN ALONE AT HOME.

EVEN AFTER THE SAIGA FAMILY ADOPTED ME...

I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO LAUGH ANYMORE.

WHEN A BOY IS ALONE... HE DOESN'T TALK.

EVEN AT SCHOOL.

BUT... I ALMOST NEVER LAUGHED.

I DIDN'T THINK I WAS SAD.

I WAS WATCHING MY CLASSMATES HAVING FUN. I THOUGHT THEY WERE GOOD AT IT, AND I WAS SECRETLY HOPING THAT THEY COULD MAKE ME LAUGH.

HELLO, IT'S MASARU! IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME!

INTERMISSION
"SMILES"

AFTER SEVERAL PUNCHES IN THE NOSE, THEY ENDED UP SPITTING NOODLES OUT FROM THEIR NOSTRILS!!

I'M TELLING YOU, THEY'RE THE ONES WHO WERE LOOKING FOR A FIGHT IN FRONT OF THE NOODLE SHOP!

LIKE THAT!

PFLORP!

HAHAHA!!

SUDDENLY, HIRO SPIT NOODLES OUT OF HIS NOSE!!

I COULDN'T BELIEVE IT!!

AFTER THAT, THEY CAME BACK WITH ABOUT TWENTY OF THEIR FRIENDS!

FLATCH...

THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS HAS ACTUALLY STOPPED IN A COASTAL TOWN IN THE IZU AREA.

FOR NOW, MR. NAKAMACHI HAS A JOB AS A WORKMAN IN A SHIPYARD.

SHUT UP!! I'LL BE STARTING WORK EARLY TOMORROW MORNING!

BUT WE HAD TROUBLES ...

THE SHOWS WE'VE HELD IN THE PARK DIDN'T WORK WELL. WE'VE DONE THREE OR FOUR OF THEM.

SO, MR NAKAMACHI DECIDED SOMETHING.

...

BECAUSE OUR EQUIPMENT IS TOO OLD.

I WANTED TO MAKE MYSELF USEFUL... DOING SOMETHING IMPORTANT.

SPOT

YOU'LL WATCH THE HOUSE, KID!

YES, SIR!

I WILL WORK HARD SO THAT WE CAN HAVE SOME SHOWS WITH RELIABLE EQUIPMENT!

I DON'T THINK I'M A GOOD COOK...

I'M SORRY!

YOU WANNA KILL US?

WHAT'S THIS DISGUSTING THING?!

AH!

WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO SWITCH BEDS WITH ME SOMETIMES?

SAY, MASARU...

YES...

I'M GOING TO BED NOW.

LISTEN ...

WELL... NOTHING.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

HIRO!! YOU DAMN LIAR!!

YOU KNOW, IN THIS OLD THREE-WHEEL TRUCK, I'M KINDA BORED...

NO PROBLEM. WHY?

YES... OKAY...

MASARU, ME TOO!!

I'M SWITCHING BEDS!

HHHH!!

DAAH

WHAT'S WITH THEM ALL OF A SUDDEN?

LET'S TAKE A LOOK...

SHI-SHI-SHI-SHI-SHIROGANE!!

PERV! YOU ONLY THINK OF THAT!!

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR DAYS FOR LISELOTTE TO LEAVE FOR THE USA AND SETTLE HER BUSINESS!

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

AT-LAST, TONIGHT...

...SHE'S GONNA ACCEPT MY LOVE!

ROCK! PAPER! SCISSORS!

HM?!

I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY THEY KEEP DOING THIS. THEY'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO BE STRONGER THAN SHIROGANE!

YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHY I'M SO CALM.

IT'S ALREADY THE EIGHTH TIME.

THAT'S BECAUSE ...

SAH...

WITH ME, SHIROGANE! WITH ME!

SHIRO-GANE! I... YOU...

GH GH

BRR BRR BRR

ZOH

PELUAATCH

COME WITH ME, SHIRO-GANE... COME!!

RRUGT!

BYOO!

VBLUP!

BADADA!

NYA!

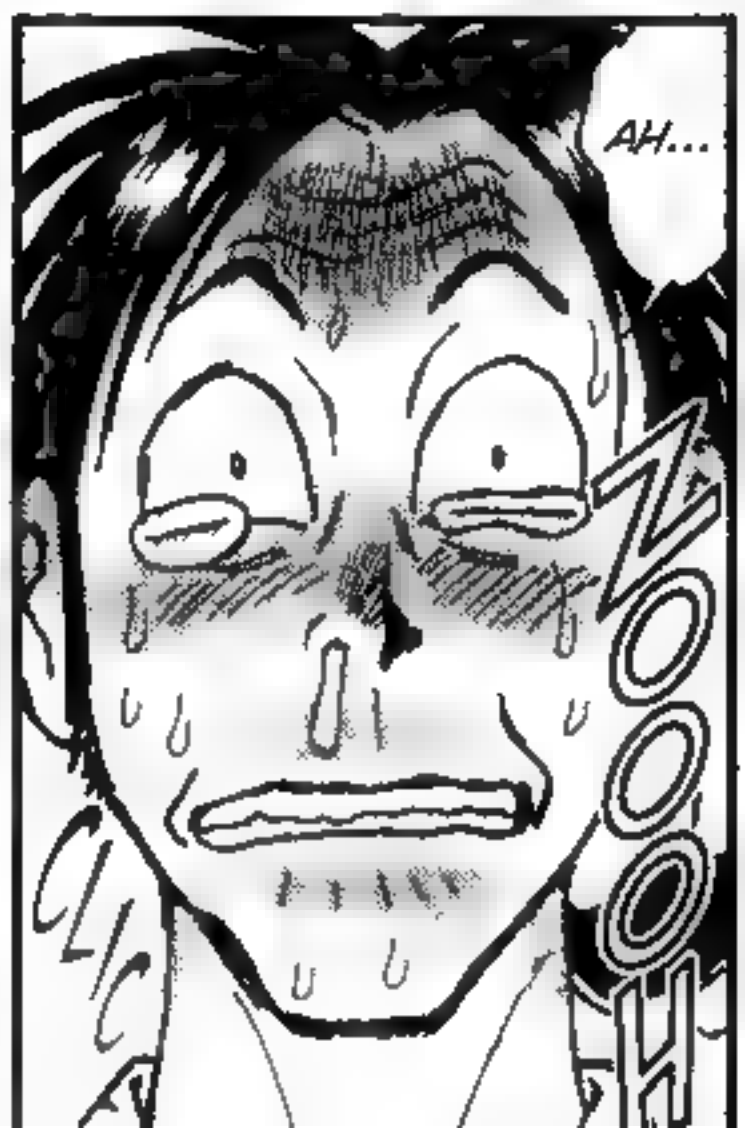
HAYA!

POPOPOPO

CLAD

A MISTAKE ...
THIS IS...
GLOUPS
CLI

CLIC
CLAC


AH...
ZOOOO
CLIC

SPLF
SPLF

EVEN THAT IS A NO...

JUST A KISS!

THE SAME THING ALWAYS HAPPENS! WHY DO THEY KEEP COMING BACK?

OH, YOUNG MASTER!

She's not angry anymore?!

HMM...

UH, SHIROGANE, PUT SOME CLOTHES ON, PLEASE!!

Yes that's true

We could see her at least.

WHAT'S GOING ON? ARE YOU THIRSTY?

NEWS

CN

"IN CARNAC, FRANCE, THE POLICE ENTERED BY FORCE."

"...A BUILDING WHERE A GANG OF KIDNAPPERS WERE HIDING"

ZNOOK

"ACCORDING TO OUR SOURCES, SEVERAL PERSONS COULD'VE DIED DURING THE ASSAULT..."

IT'S DANGEROUS IN FRANCE TOO!

DAMN!

"THE CRIMINALS WERE HEAVILY ARMED..."

YES.

THERE ARE MYSTERIOUS STONES THERE.

SO MAYBE YOU KNOW CARNAC.

SHIROGANE, YOU COME FROM FRANCE, DON'T YOU?

"LIEUTENANT JEAN MALICLAIR, WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE OPERATION, COMMENTED."

"WELL... THANKS TO THE COLLABORATION OF SHIRO... HM, CIVILIANS WHO WERE ON THE SCENE, THE CRIMINALS HAVE BEEN NEUTRALIZED..."

ZOING

YEEEES!

HIRO, NORI, BREAKFAST'S READY.

YES!

MASARU, BEFORE I GO TO WORK, LET'S DO SOME LITTLE EXERCISES!

THANK YOU FOR THE MEAL!

DON'T BE IMPATIENT. IF YOU TRAIN WELL, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO KEEP YOUR BALANCE.

YOU MUST ALWAYS HAVE ONE FOOT BELOW TO STABILIZE YOU. THE OTHER ONE MUST MOVE FORWARD AND BACK-WARD.

HANG ON CARE-FULLY.

HA!

HEH!!

ZAF

MASARU ...

COURA-GEOUS!

GRR...

YOUNG MASTER !!

WAHAHAHA!!

WELL...

YES.

IT DOESN'T MATTER! YOU TOO, SHIROGANE ...

...I'M SURE YOU THOUGHT THAT I HIT THE GROUND IN AN UNBELIEVABLE POSITION, DIDN'T YOU?

NO, WE DIDN'T LAUGH!!

AS YOU LAUGHED AT THE YOUNG MASTER, I THINK YOU

CLIC CLAC

KIDS HAVE AN INNATE SENSE OF BALANCE! MAKE THE MOST OF IT!

I'VE DECIDED TO LEARN CIRCUS TECHNIQUES, LITTLE BY LITTLE.

Hm You're not really sturdy either

FIVE, SIX, AND SEEEEVEN

WELL, LET'S STOP THERE. IF YOU HAVE TOO MANY MUSCLES AT YOUR AGE...

YOU WON'T GROW UP.

OUAHHH HHAA!!

BECAUSE I DON'T WANNA JUST "STAY" IN THE NAKAMACHI CIRCUS.

YES, GOOD. RELAX YOUR SHOULDERS AND ALWAYS KEEP YOUR WRISTS SUPPLE...

NOW, IT'S MY TURN TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING, YOUNG MASTER...

SHIROGANE LOOKS KINDA HAPPY...

THE FINGERS MUST ONLY MOVE QUICKLY AT THE BEGINNING OF A SEQUENCE.

YES, OKAY.

HOWEVER, YOU ARE RICH. YOU DON'T HAVE TO LEARN THOSE THINGS.

YOUNG MASTER, IF YOU ALLOW ME TO SAY THIS... YOU LEARN SOMETHING NEW EVERY DAY...

I DIDN'T LAUGH MUCH.

BEFORE, I WAS LIKE YOU...

WHEN I LOOKED AT MY CLASSMATES MAKING ONE ANOTHER LAUGH, I THOUGHT THAT I WOULD'VE ALSO LIKED...

...TO HAVE PEOPLE AROUND ME, TO MAKE ME LAUGH TOO.

AH?

LET ME EXPLAIN...

IT'S NOT WHEN SOMEONE'S MAKING ME LAUGH THAT I REALLY FELT HAPPY...

...

WHY'S THAT?

BUT... I THINK THAT...

IT'S A LITTLE BIT SILLY TO THINK THIS WAY.

BUT WHEN I ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING...

...BY MYSELF.

IT'S NORMAL TO FEEL GOOD WHEN SHIROGANE'S HOLDING YOU IN HER ARMS!!

EVEN LIKE THAT?

SHIRO-GANE..

I BELIEVE I'M REALLY HAPPY NOW!

...

I LAUGH FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.

WITH ALL THESE PEOPLE...

...IS WITH THE ONE WITH A GOOD SMILE".

"THE SOFT STONE ...

BLACKOUT

EVEN MY FATHER, THE CHIEF OF OUR SMALL STATE, CANNOT KNOW

AS A PRINCESS OF A SMALL COMMUNITY,

MY PRESENCE IS MERELY A FORMAL-ITY.

NOBODY NOTICES...

THAT I HAVE "NOTHING" IN MY EYES.

ACT IX . KARAKURI : THE PRINCESS OF THE AUTOMATONS

"THE CURTAIN RISES"

ANYTHING EXCEPT THIS VISION THAT IS NOW ENGRAVED IN MY MIND.

...THAT I CAN'T SEE

ACT VIII : KARAKURI
THE PRINCESS OF THE AUTOMATONS
"THE CURTAIN RISES"

VVVHH...

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW, LUCILLE?

ARLEQUINO IS SUCH AN IMBECILE.

AT LEAST WE WON'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE AIRING OUT THE CASTLE.

YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, GUY?

YEAH... WE COULDN'T MAKE A MORE STUBBORN PERSON THAN YOU.

WELL...

I AM GOING TO CONTINUE WITH MY MISSION.

A SHIROGANE'S TASK IS TO ANNIHILATE THE AUTOMATONS!

SHLING

NO, NO, NOT AT ALL! MY HEART IS FULL OF JOY! JUST LIKE DANTE WHO ASCENDED TO HEAVEN...

... GUIDED BY BEATRICE!

OLDIE IS PRETTY SLICK!

I'VE KNOW YOU SINCE YOU WERE A LITTLE BOY.

HE HE,

SO SHINY!

AHH, NOOO!! MOMMMYYY!! GIMME BACK MY MEDAL !!!

ALL THAT'S LEFT TO DO IS TO FIND IT BEFORE THEY DO.

THEY JUST HAVE THE METHOD TO FIND IT; THEY DON'T HAVE THE STONE.

OH... AND YOU KNOW HOW TO DO THAT?

ARLEQUINO SAID HE HAD A WAY TO FIND OUR STONE.

SO... WHAT NOW?

WE NEED TO GO FAR FROM HERE.

IT'S NOT LIKE WE'VE BEEN SITTING ON OUR THUMBS.

WE'VE BEEN SEARCH-ING ...

FOR THE STONE FOR 18 YEARS.

GOODBYE.

A SMALL COUNTRY OF FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND INHABITANTS

LOCATED BETWEEN FRANCE AND SWITZER-LAND.

THE COMMUNITY OF LOHEN-STEIN...

THE TOTAL AREA OF THIS COUNTRY IS... MMM... SLIGHTLY SMALLER THAN THE PREFECTURE OF SAITAMA, JAPAN.

BLA BLA BLA BLA

WHAT'S UP WITH ALL THE PEOPLE?!

HAHA HA!!

SAY, GUY...

IN OTHER WORDS, THEIR PRINCE IS LIKE A KING, AND THEY INTEND FOR HIM TO ACT LIKE ONE.

THIS IS A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY. THE STATE IS UNDER COMMAND OF A PRINCE, A PRIME MINISTER, AND HIS GOVERNMENT.

BEFORE, THE STEEL INDUSTRY WAS A THRIVING SECTOR, BUT NOWADAYS LOHENSTEIN HAS INVESTED A LOT OF MONEY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGIES.

HEY, GUY...

I'VE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF THIS COUNTRY!

OH, AND WHY DOES IT ALWAYS HAVE TO BE ME WHO'S DRIVING WHEN I DON'T EVEN HAVE MY LICENSE!!!

WHY THE HELL DID I COME HERE WITH YOU GUYS?!

AND SO...

PISS OFF... PISS OFF...

OF COURSE! YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT WE CAN'T DIE!

COME ON, NARUMI! IT'S NOT A PROBLEM! EVEN IF WE FALL FROM A CLIFF...

IF WE GET INTO AN ACCIDENT IT WON'T BE MY FAULT!

I'M POOPED, YOU GOT THAT?! DEAD TIRED!!!

I WENT TO ESTABLISH A SUSPECT LIST FOR...

...ANYBODY LINKED TO THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE "SOFT STONE."

I DIDN'T GO TO JAPAN SPECIFICALLY TO SAVE YOU.

OKAY, THEN NOW WHAT?

AH?!

I PRESENT TO YOU JOHN-ADAM II.

WELL, WHO IS IT?

THERE'S A PERSON WHO LEFT JAPAN JUST AFTER THE INCIDENT.

SO...

TAP

THE PRINCE OF LOHENSTEIN.

HIS STORY IS VERY MUCH LINKED WITH THE "SOFT STONE."

NOTABLY WITH A HEAD OF A COMPANY...

WHILE HE WAS DOING RESEARCH IN THE INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY FIELD,

HE CAME ACROSS SOME JAPANESE COMPANIES

...

HE ESTAB-LISHED HIMSELF WITH CERTAIN PEOPLE.

NARUMI .. I'LL REMIND YOU THAT YOU CAN'T STORE THE STONE IN AN ADULT BODY.

YOU MEAN THAT... THE ROYAL FAMILY ACTUALLY USED ONE OF THEIR OWN TO HIDE THE "SOFT STONE"?!

"THE SOFT STONE IS WITH THE ONE WITH A GOOD SMILE"...

RIGHT?

THAT MEANS THAT...

HOURRA!!

HOURRA!!

DAMN! I LOSE ALL FIGHTS WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO A KID! I CAN'T DO IT!

!

IT'S AN EVENT ORGANIZED IN THEIR HONOR.

THE YOUNG ARISTOCRATS ARE INTRODUCED TO SOCIETY AT 18.

WHAT?!

IT'S AN ORGANIZED FESTIVAL TO CELEBRATE THE PRINCESS'S 18TH BIRTHDAY. IT'S A TRADITION TO CELEBRATE IT AT THE SAME TIME AS THE DEBUTANTE BALL.

LOOKS LIKE THERE'S A SHOW OVER THERE...

BRAVO!!

HOURAA!!

BECAUSE IN THE BODY OF THAT YOUNG WOMAN, ELISE, THE STONE COULD BE HIDING.

HOURAA!!

LOOK CLOSELY, NARUMI.

VLAM

WHAAAAT?!

OUAH!!

AND WE NEED TO CHECK IT OUT BEFORE THE AUTOMATONS DO...

YES

IN THE BODY.. OF THAT SMALL GIRL?!

HOURAH!!

HMM...

BLA BLA

WHATS HAPPENING OVER THERE?

BLA BLA

OOH

AH!

WHAT'S THAT THING?!

CLIC CLIC CLIC

MAKE WAY!

WHY ARE YOU BLOCKING THE STREET ?!

WHAT ?!

IT'S AN ALITO-MATON!

CLAC

SCRAPING

WATCH OUT!!!

WHAT THE HELL ?!

RUMBLE ON MY BODY

FROM

HELP!!

KRAM

I'LL GO GET OLYMPIA ...

AAA

NARUMI! THE AUTOMATON IS GOING FOR THE PRINCESS!

HHH!!

RUN, YOUR HIGH-NESS !!

WOW

AAAHH !!

CRASH

INCREDIBLE HE CAN RUN THAT FAST THROUGH A PANICKED CROWD. NARUMI, YOU'RE LIKE A WILD ANIMAL

HER HIGHNESS HAS BEEN CAPTURED !!

DON'T SHOOT!

HE'S RUNNING AWAY!!

HUH?

AFTER THEM!!

JUST WAIT A DAMN MINUTE !!

BLACKOUT

ACT VIII : KARAKURI
THE PRINCESS OF THE AUTOMATONS
"ELISE"

OUR COMMERCIAL EXPORTS TO THAT COUNTRY WILL CONTINUE WITHOUT A PROBLEM.

I SEE.

THANK YOU, ELISE, FOR YOUR WORK AS AMBAS-SADOR.

IT WAS MY PLEASURE, FATHER.

ARE YOU GETTING BETTER AT HORSEBACK RIDING? YOUR MOTHER LOVED HORSES .

YOU KNOW, YOU LOOK MORE AND MORE LIKE YOUR MOTHER, BLESS HER SOUL...

YES, FATHER...

PLEASE EXCUSE ME, FATHER. I HAVE A LECTURE TO GO TO WITH SOME FRIENDS.

OH... ABOUT THAT, I CANCELLED IT!

...

THE DEBUTANT BALL IS SOON.

YOUR MOTHER WOULD HAVE BEEN PROUD TO SEE YOU ATTEND.

ELISE ...

EVEN IF YOUR FRIENDS ARE OF EQUAL SOCIAL STANDING, I THINK YOU SHOULD CHOOSE YOUR ACQUAINTANCES MORE CAREFULLY... IN MY OPINION, THEY HAVE TOO MUCH OF A LIKING TOWARDS AMERICA.

HM?

AGAIN?

YOUR HIGHNESS .. THE MINISTER OF HEALTH WISHES TO SEE YOU.

...

YES, FATHER.

ITS USELESS TO MEET WITH ME AGAIN!

THE BUDGETS HAVE ALREADY BEEN VOTED ON BY PARLIAMENT.

HIGHNESS!

I TOLD YOU THAT IT'S USE-LESS!

WE DON'T HAVE THE BUDGET FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR.

WE NEED MORE NURSES AND DOCTORS!

BUT... FOR OUR COUNTRY TO FLOURISH...

ALSO, OUR HOSPITALS AREN'T EQUALLY DISPERSED, SO WE DON'T HAVE EQUILIBRIUM. WE NEED YOUR HELP, HIGHNESS. WE NEED...

LEAVE!

BUT ...

WHAT'S WRONG. ELISE?

...

FINALLY...

...

NOTHING AT ALL, FATHER...

NOTHING ...

I NEED TO GO REST. I DON'T WANT TO BE DISTURBED BY ANYBODY. IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?

TAH

CLAC

RIDING ...

MY FRIENDS ...

SPOILS

...

...

BAM

PAF

PIF

POF

PA

TAH

OW...

QUOI ?!

HEY, IMBECILE, LET GO OF THE PRINCESS !!

YAHHHHH!

SOLID BOMB

DON'T WORRY... I'M HERE TO SAVE YOU!

SWING

EAHH !!

OHH!

VRRAM

DADADA

DADADA

CLANG

VROOM

THEY EVEN ARRANGED A HELICOPTER...

BU

BAT

AAA

VON

HEY !!

DOON

VON

DOM

WHO ARE YOU?!

TAN TAN TAN

WHAT?! BUT...

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE EATING ENOUGH ?!

HEY, YOU SURE ARE SKINNY!

KILL HIM THEN!

IT SEEMS WE HAVE AN EXTRA GUEST, MADAM APTCHA.

WE CONTINUE AS PLANNED !

WHAT DO WE DO?

YOU'RE ALL PART OF THE GROUP OF ASSHOLES THEN?

WITH PLEASURE ...

SCHLAC

WE KNOW!

OBVI-OUSLY.

YOU REALIZE THAT...

I'M THE PRINCESS OF LOHENSTEIN?

TO SEE YOU SAFE AND SOUND.

SOME-BODY...

WISHES ...

DAAAH

WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO?

OKAY, NOW... CLOSE YOUR EYES, PRINCESS.

...USE YOUR KNIVES INSTEAD.

SAH...

LISTEN, WITH ALL THESE GUNS, WE RISK HURTING THE PRINCESS!

WLDNDN

QUITE THE CONTRARY!

BUT... THAT'S IMPOS-SIBLE !!

I INTEND TO GET OFF THIS HELICOPTER

SBAM!

!!

CHIII

BADOOM

SHA-SHA

CLANG

CLOSE THE BACK DOOR IMMEDIATELY !!

DAH

FUCK !

TOO LATE...

HOO HOO

CRAP!!

UH...

UHM...

DADADA

KARAKURI CIRCUS / END OF VOLUME 9

QUAA-HA-HA-HA!!

WE WERE ACTUALLY IN THE AIR!